



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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MANAGER AT ARANSAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE RECEIVES WHITE HOUSE AWARD FOR RECYCLING WORK

A major grassroots recycling and clean-up effort involving more than 120 tons of scrap metal and several thousand drums of abandoned hazardous waste has earned the manager of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Aransas National Wildlife Refuge a Presidential award. Brent Giezentanner today received the White House's "Closing the Circle" Award for an extensive recycling and waste reduction effort initiated at the refuge, winter home of the world's last wild flock of endangered whooping cranes.

Giezentanner, one of 23 recipients nationwide, was the only Interior Department employee to receive the prestigious award. President Clinton authorized the award last year in signing Executive Order 12873, which not only encourages recycling but also purchasing products made from those materials.

Giezentanner and his staff manage 115,000 acres of wildlife habitat on the Aransas and Matagorda Island national wildlife refuges along the Texas Gulf Coast. Mild winters and protected habitat ranging from tidal estuaries to freshwater marshes and native coastal prairies attract more than 389 species of birds to the refuges.

Both refuges recycle aluminum, steel, plastic, newspapers, office paper, cardboard, and glass. In 1994, more than 10,500 pounds of these materials were taken to the Calhoun County recycling center. The refuge has purchased many recycled products, from plastic lumber for boardwalks and bulkheads to office products.

"I can personally attest to the staff's dedication to husbanding resources and maintaining clean and safe public lands," said Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, who has visited the refuges twice in recent years. "Brent takes his duty seriously as steward of one of America's most outstanding national wildlife refuges and guardian of some of this country's most beloved wildlife."

Nancy Kaufman, director of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Southwest Region, praised Giezentanner for designing the programs. "He was personally responsible for their success," she

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said. "His recycling philosophy is well known throughout the community. He has demonstrated it by devoting many hours assisting the county recycling center."

Matagorda Island presented a challenge for the refuge and the State of Texas in terms of solid waste disposal. Upland areas of the refuge, which was created from an abandoned Air Force base in 1978 and the purchase of a private ranch in 1987, were littered with debris and abandoned buildings. Giezentanner and his staff and state partners planned and implemented an aggressive program to clean up the island, in which refuge staff recycled more than 120 tons of scrap metal. The refuge also eliminated all open dumps and arranged for garbage to be hauled off the island by barge.

Another challenge for the refuge and state was debris and abandoned drums containing hazardous waste that washed ashore. Giezentanner and staff developed formal agreements with the State of Texas and the Environmental Protection Agency to dispose of the materials, which in 1994 totalled 3,223 drums and containers. With the Texas Nature Conservancy, Giezentanner established an environmental education program on the island, involving local teachers and schools in the effort, which now provides formal classroom work on bays, estuaries, and marshes.

"Giezentanner's efforts and those of his staff, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and General Land office partners, contributed immensely to a clean shoreline and healthy ecosystem on Matagorda Island," Kaufman added.

Earlier this year, Giezentanner received the Department of the Interior's Environmental Achievement Award, presented at the Department's annual Conference on the Environment in Colorado Springs on April 24. The award was given for outstanding personal accomplishments and leadership in a comprehensive hazard and pollution abatement program, recycling, and other environmental achievements. Giezentanner also received an award for leadership from the Calhoun County Extension Service this year for his work supporting the county's recycling effort.

"Recognition for what we're doing is nice," Giezentanner said, "but the real personal satisfaction comes from doing the right thing--that's even more important. This fits in with my personal philosophy: if we waste our natural resources and can't breathe the air or drink the water, nothing else really matters."